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MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS' PERCEPTIONS OF MOTHERS' EXPERIENCES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE IN NEW MEXICO

BY

ANISE ELAINE CRNKOVIC

A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate School

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Interdisciplinary Program

Subjects: Curriculum and Instruction,

Educational Management and Development,

Family and Consumer Sciences

New Mexico State University

Las Cruces, New Mexico

May, 1998

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"Mental Health Professionals' Perceptions of Mothers' Experiences of Family Violence in New Mexico," a dissertation prepared by Anise Elaine Crnkovic in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, has been approved and accepted by the following:

Timothy J. Pettibone
Dean of the Graduate School

Robert L. DelCampo
Chair of the Examining Committee

5-8-98
Date

Committee in Charge:

Dr. Robert L. DelCampo, Chair

Dr. Elizabeth Cahill

Dr. Maria Luisa Gonzalez

Dr. O.D. Hadfield

Dr. Virginia Owens

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory of my father,

Vernon Eugene Crnkovic, Sr.
1932-1997

Thank you for loving us, Daddy, that we never had to know this pain

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with the deepest gratitude, love, and respect that I salute my mother, Gloria Crnkovic, who through the face of tremendous adversity found a way to educate her beloved children. I am privileged to have been blessed with such a champion of progress who never stopped believing in me. I will always take great joy in knowing she is an active participant in my life, and it is so much the better for her presence. In addition, I could never have even begun such a journey without my sister, Nanette Crnkovic, standing near to help me along the way. She pulled me through many a crisis, and I am eternally grateful (particularly for those wonderful snacks that kept my committee content during all of those meetings!).

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VITA

December 18, 1970 ~ Born in Alamogordo, New Mexico

1993 ~ A.A., New Mexico State University

1993 ~ B.A., New Mexico State University

1995 ~ M.S., New Mexico State University

1993-1995 ~ Research/Teaching Assistant, New Mexico State University

1995-1998 ~ Doctoral Fellow/Teaching Assistant, New Mexico State University

1995-Present ~ Director, Intensive Outpatient Program, Mesilla Valley Hospital

1995-Present ~ Family Therapist, Mesilla Valley Hospital

1986-Present ~ Community Counselor, Oro Grande, New Mexico

ORGANIZATIONS

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

National Council on Family Relations

Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges

PUBLICATIONS

With R.L. DelCampo. (1997) The Jockey Who Couldn't Frown in Thomas, F. & Nelson, T. (Eds.) Tales from Treating Families. New York: Hawthorne Press.

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With R. Smitley, (1993). Color and Psychology: Implications for Fashion Merchandising. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the New Mexico Home Economics Association.

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ABSTRACT

MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS' PERCEPTIONS OF MOTHERS' EXPERIENCES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE IN NEW MEXICO

BY

ANISE ELAINE CRNKOVIC, M.S.

Doctor of Philosophy, Interdisciplinary Program

New Mexico State University

Las Cruces, New Mexico, 1998

Dr. Robert L. DelCampo, Chair

This study explored and defined the perceptions of mental health professionals regarding violent families in New Mexico. The Family Environment Scale scores of ninety-two Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists, Licensed Masters of Social Work, and Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors were compared to those of twenty-eight mothers in battered women's shelters in New Mexico. The professionals were asked to answer the questions as they thought an abused mother from a violent home would.

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It was discovered that the professionals differed significantly from the mothers in their perceptions on the levels of Cohesion, Expressiveness, Independence, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Emphasis, and Moral-Religious Emphasis. In all areas, the professionals believed the mothers to have lower levels of these constructs than the mothers actually reported. The professionals' scores were also compared controlling for license and gender, with occasional differences between gender, though no statistical analyses were considered practical in that area due to the low number of male respondents. When the license groups were compared, it was discovered that no significant differences existed between licenses pertaining to perceptions of family environment in comparison to mothers from the actual families.

The results of the study could serve as an indicator to professionals that they need to be more aware of the obscure dynamics of violent families, and should strive to increase their understanding of the violent family environment in order to provide appropriate services to such clients.

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